MUSIC AND DRAMA

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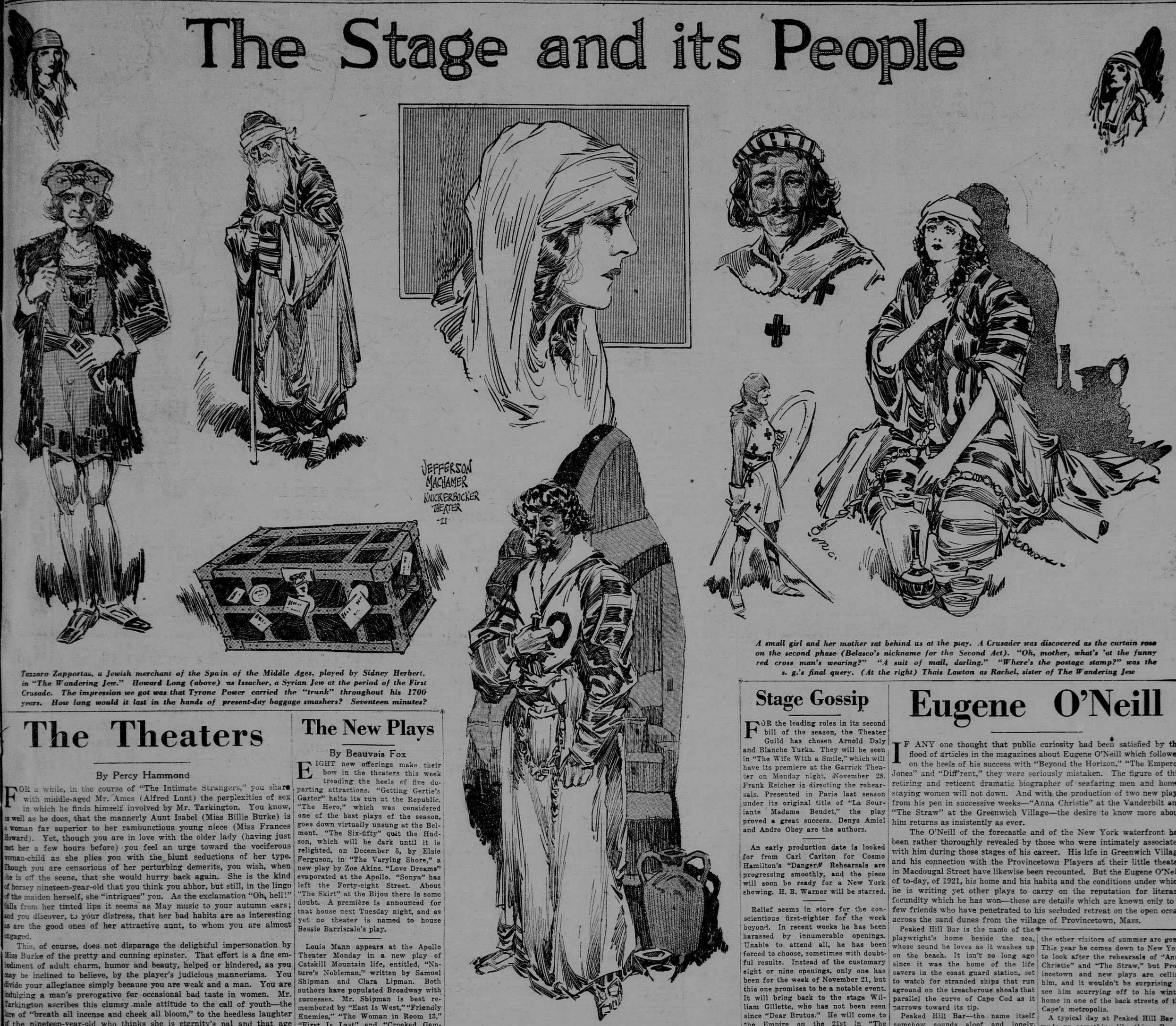
The Stage and its People



Tazzaro Zapportas, a Jewish merchant of the Spain of the Middle Ages, played by Sidney Herbert, in "The Wandering Jew." Howard Long (above) as Issacher, a Syrian Jew at the period of the First Crusade. The impression we got was that Tyrone Power carried the "trunk" throughout his 1700 years. How long would it last in the hands of present-day baggage smashers? Seventeen minutes?

A small girl and her mother sat behind us at the play. A Crusader was discovered as the curtain rose on the second phase (Belasco's nickname for the Second Act). "Oh, mother, what's 'at the funny red cross man's wearing?" "A suit of mail, darling." "Where's the postage stamp?" was the s. g.'s final query. (At the right) Thais Lawton as Rachel, sister of The Wandering Jew

The Theaters

By Percy Hammond

FOR a while, in the course of "The Intimate Strangers," you share with middle-aged Mr. Ames (Alfred Lunt) the perplexities of sex in which he finds himself involved by Mr. Tarkington. You know, as well as he does, that the mannerly Aunt Isabel (Miss Billie Burke) is a woman far superior to her rambunctious young niece (Miss Frances Howard). Yet, though you are in love with the older lady (having just met her a few hours before) you feel an urge toward the vociferous woman-child as she plies you with the blunt seductions of her type. Though you are censorious of her perturbing demerits, you wish, when she is off the scene, that she would hurry back again. She is the kind of horsey nineteen-year-old that you think you abhor, but still, in the lingo of the maiden herself, she "intrigues" you. As the exclamation "Oh, hell!" falls from her tinted lips it seems as May music to your autumn ears; and you discover, to your distress, that her bad habits are as interesting as are the good ones of her attractive aunt, to whom you are almost engaged.

This, of course, does not disparage the delightful impersonation by Miss Burke of the pretty and cunning spinster. That effort is a fine embodiment of adult charm, humor and beauty, helped or hindered, as you may be inclined to believe, by the player's judicious mannerisms. You divide your allegiance simply because you are weak and a man. You are indulging a man's prerogative for occasional bad taste in women. Mr. Tarkington ascribes this clumsy male attitude to the call of youth—the lure of "breath all incense and cheek all bloom," to the heedless laughter of the nineteen-year-old who thinks she is eternity's pal and that age exists only for others. She believes that maturity is antique and funny. "Why is Aunt Isabel ashamed of how old she is?" this flapper shouts. "I'm nineteen!" It might be interesting for you to analyze, if you are over thirty, your emotions in the matter, in the event that you have not already done so.

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All is propitious in the romance of Mr. Ames and Aunt Isabel until the windy advent of the virgin mænad. Having been castaways for ten hours in a desolate railway station in upper New York State, they quarrel over food and fall in love. Incidental to his soft avowals Mr. Ames announces his displeasure with the new generation of women. He has remained a bachelor because of his loathing for the loud, slangy, cigarette-smoking, gin-drinking, breeches-wearing, ingenue of the day. He likes quiet women of gentle breeding, like Aunt Isabel, and he assures her that he will not care for her obstreperous kinswoman. In one of the most sweetly sophisticated interludes of Mr. Tarkington's achievements as a playwright, Mr. Ames and Aunt Isabel go to sleep on two benches in the desolate depot, almost engaged to be married. At least, they are tenderly solicitous about each other's comfort; and, after sentimental negotiations they decide that both may be allowed to say "Good night . . . dear!"

But arriving with the morning is the brisk flapper in breeches and bobbed hair, affronting the rural silences with ribald jocularities about the compromising position in which she finds her decorous aunt. She thinks it might be subject to interpretations. Having no cigarettes, oh, hell, she asks Mr. Ames to gimme her one, observing, meantime, that, by golly, he isn't bad looking. Old, of course, but still a prospect. "Ab-so-lutely!" Dazed by her fascinations he slips into her spell, and it is he who sits beside her as she drives the forty miles to the home of her and her aunt.

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There it is that the two ladies strive each to win the visitor's admiration, the breezy virgin with the sex's most ancient tricks, the sedate spinster with its most modern ones. The niece talks to him with the obviously dishonest candors of her kind, telling him that he sure is a "fast worker" and operating the eyes and the arms in the platitudinous gestures of the baby-wanton. Her favorite device is the prehistoric expedient of causing him every now and then to fasten or unfasten her slippers. All of which causes her youthful suitor (Mr. Glenn Hunter) to brood in bitter disapprobation and to make wise and cutting comment. Mr. Tarkington was never more humorous than he is in this character, and neither was Mr. Hunter.

Aunt Isabel, however, performs the oldest wiles in the newest ways. Knowing that Mr. Ames suspects her to be aged, because she is the great-aunt of the terrible infant, she feigns years and their infirmities, planning at the end to surprise him with her comparative youth. She acquires rheumatism, wears a shawl and woolen slippers, and talks to him (smiling to herself) of the World's Fair and President Harrison. When finally, after winning him, she offers him the family Bible so that he may calculate her age therefrom, he foregoes the information, and takes her in his arms.

Miss Burke's performance of Aunt Isabel is, to my mind, rather a noteworthy endeavor in comedy, embracing, as it does, in skillful fashion, the varying moods of the character—its twinkling pathos, its sagacities, its mockery and banter. It causes one to wonder why, as it is suspected, her reputation as a comedienne is less than her achievements entitle it to be. I recall few if any ill deeds in her stage career, and I remember one impersonation that was a masterpiece—that of Pinero's "Mind-the-Paint Girl." "The Intimate Strangers," by the way, was written by Mr. Tarkington for Miss Maude Adams who, wisely, I think, refrained from playing it.

The New Plays

By Beauvais Fox

EIGHT new offerings make their bow in the theaters this week treading the heels of five departing attractions. "Getting Gertie's Garter" halts its run at the Republic. "The Hero," which was considered one of the best plays of the season, goes down virtually unsung at the Belmont. "The Six-fifty" quit the Hudson, which will be dark until it is relighted, on December 5, by Elsie Ferguson, in "The Varying Shore," a new play by Zoe Akins. "Love Dreams" evaporated at the Apollo. "Sonya" has left the Forty-eight Street. About "The Skirt" at the Bijou there is some doubt. A première is announced for that house next Tuesday night, and as yet no theater is named to house Bessie Barriscale's play.

Louis Mann appears at the Apollo Theater Monday in a new play of Catskill Mountain life, entitled, "Nature's Nobleman," written by Samuel Shipman and Clara Lipman. Both authors have populated Broadway with successes. Mr. Shipman is best remembered by "East Is West," "Friendly Enemies," "The Woman in Room 13," "First Is Last" and "Crooked Gamblers." Clara Lipman collaborated with Mr. Shipman on "Elevating a Husband," "Children of To-day," "Flames and Embers" and "Hunted Lady." "Nature's Nobleman" is a story of hotel life in the mountains in which Mr. Mann represents a German inn keeper, with all the faults and foibles and sentimentalities that we have smiled on for years in Mr. Mann's character drawing.

Arnold Bennett's satirical comedy, "The Title," which had a season's run at the Royalty Theater in London, will have its metropolitan première Monday evening at the Belmont Theater under the management of Richard Hemdon. In this play Mr. Bennett directs his barb at that bulwark of the British people, the bestowal of honors. According to the leading character, which is portrayed by Lumsden Hare, these titles are bestowed by the crown "only when the government is ill and it is necessary to replenish its depleted store of vitality or credit." Although Mr. Bennett treats his subject in the guise of satire it is not without zones of delightful and refined comedy.

Each season the Provincetown Players strive for something different, and for the present season's first offering a star has been engaged, for the first time in the organization's history. Margaret Wycherly, who has appeared in "The Thirteenth Chair," "Mixed Marriage," "Jane Clegg" and other notable productions, will have the leading role in Susan Glaspell's play, "The Verge."

Another comedy from the pen of A. A. Milne, the English playwright, bearing the mystifying title of "The Great Broxopp," will be seen on Tuesday evening at the Punch and Judy Theater. Earlier in the year the same author's "Mr. Pim Passes By" was produced by the Theater Guild, and three seasons ago Ethel Barrymore starred in his "Belinda." These three comedies are the only ones written by Milne that have been presented here. Concerning the latest opus, its sponsors care to reveal little in advance

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(Above) Belle Bennett as Ollalla Quintana makes the best of a strenuous opportunity. We wonder if she is the same Belle Bennett who used to star in weekly repertoire with Billy Bennett's kerosene circuit tent show out in Nebraska? (Below) Tyrone Power as The Wandering Jew. (We'd like to have lived 1700 years, just to see how we looked in that style.)

Stage Gossip

FOR the leading roles in its second bill of the season, the Theater Guild has chosen Arnold Daly and Blanche Yurka. They will be seen in "The Wife With a Smile," which will have its premiere at the Garrick Theater on Monday night, November 28. Frank Reicher is directing the rehearsals. Presented in Paris last season under its original title of "La Souriante Madame Beudet," the play proved a great success. Denys Amiel and Andre Obey are the authors.

An early production date is looked for from Carl Carlton for Cosmo Hamilton's "Danger." Rehearsals are progressing smoothly, and the piece will soon be ready for a New York showing. H. B. Warner will be starred.

Relief seems in store for the conscientious first-nighter for the week beyond. In recent weeks he has been harassed by innumerable openings. Unable to attend all, he has been forced to choose, sometimes with doubtful results. Instead of the customary eight or nine openings, only one has been for the week of November 21, but this one promises to be a notable event. It will bring back to the stage William Gillette, who has not been seen since "Dear Brutus." He will come to the Empire on the 21st in "The Dream Maker." The play is the work of Howard E. Morton and Mr. Gillette. Included in his company will be William Morris, Miriam Sears, Myrtle Tannahill, Frank Morgan, Charles Laite, Harry E. Humphreys, Marie Haynes, Arthur J. Wood and Arthur Ebeuhack.

In San Francisco last week Fay Bainter played her rôle of the Chinese maiden in "East Is West" for the 1000th time. Mayor Rolph, the Chinese Consul and other officials were in the audience.

Langdon McCormick's melodrama, "The Storm," will be revived for an extended run in New York in January. The picture rights of the play have been sold and it will be screened in March in the Northwest.

Maclyn Arbuckle will appear in a new comedy after the New Year. At present he is acting "The Prodigal Judge" for the films. Vaughan Kester, the author, has made a stage version of the novel for Mr. Arbuckle.

A pageant, another edition of the "Midnight Jollies," and other features will be seen at the annual Equity ball at the Hotel Astor next Saturday night beginning at 11 o'clock. Equity's general stage director, Hassard Short, has again arranged the pageant, which will be called "The Equity Star" and will include a special song of the same title written by Grant Stewart, recording

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Eugene O'Neill

IF ANY one thought that public curiosity had been satisfied by the flood of articles in the magazines about Eugene O'Neill which followed on the heels of his success with "Beyond the Horizon," "The Emperor Jones" and "Diff'rent," they were seriously mistaken. The figure of this retiring and reticent dramatic biographer of seafaring men and home-staying women will not down. And with the production of two new plays from his pen in successive weeks—"Anna Christie" at the Vanderbilt and "The Straw" at the Greenwich Village—the desire to know more about him returns as insistently as ever.

The O'Neill of the forecastle and of the New York waterfront has been rather thoroughly revealed by those who were intimately associated with him during those stages of his career. His life in Greenwich Village and his connection with the Provincetown Players at their little theater in Macdougal Street have likewise been recounted. But the Eugene O'Neill of to-day, of 1921, his home and his habits and the conditions under which he is writing yet other plays to carry on the reputation for literary fecundity which he has won—these are details which are known only to a few friends who have penetrated to his secluded retreat on the open ocean across the sand dunes from the village of Provincetown, Mass.

Peaked Hill Bar is the name of the playwright's home beside the sea, whose sound he loves as it washes up on the beach. It isn't so long ago since it was the home of the life savers in the coast guard station, set to watch for stranded ships that run aground on the treacherous shoals that parallel the curve of Cape Cod as it narrows toward its tip.

Peaked Hill Bar—the name itself somehow sounds aloof and lonely. And it lives up to these suspicions. Provincetown itself is difficult enough to get at, except in midsummer, when the Dorothy Bradford plies daily across Massachusetts Bay from Boston. The long and dusty rail trip around the Cape is tedious enough to make the traveler feel as if the village of Provincetown ought to be the end of his journey whether it is or not. But it isn't—if you are determined to seek out the playwright in his sand-locked exile. After you have taken breath—the invigorating salt breath of the sea—you have to scour the town for a horse and light wagon. No automobile will get you further than the ditch off the main road. Better yet, you will decide to hoof it through the sand, which even after rain comes up to your ankles. An hour of this—more or less, according to your kinship with nature—finally brings you to the rambling frame building nestling under a sand dune that seems about to topple over and bury it. And this is Peaked Hill Bar.

No one except the life-savers would ever think of living in this secluded spot the year round. In dead of winter, when the storms rage, the sand is whirled by the wind at such a stinging pace that in less than a season it etches a new pane of window glass until you cannot see through it. But with the first sign of spring, even before the last snows have ceased to fall, the playwright settles down to his drawing board, spreads out his paper and starts his pencil across it to make a new play. And there he remains until long after the mosquitoes and the flies and the other visitors of summer are gone. This year he comes down to New York to look after the rehearsals of "Anna Christie" and "The Straw," but Provincetown and new plays are calling him, and it wouldn't be surprising to see him scurrying off to his winter home in one of the back streets of the Cape's metropolis.

A typical day at Peaked Hill Bar is made up something like this: Breakfast is early but not too early. And then comes work—fresh work, new work—as the playwright sits on his bed with his drawing board propped against raised knees. Sometimes, when the tide is right, there is a dip in the ocean before lunch which comes at about the usual hour. For there is food at Peaked Hill Bar, even if it does have to depend on the weekly trip of the wagon from the village in order to get there. The afternoon is usually devoted to revision of what the morning—or some other morning—had produced and sometimes to copying the final draft of a new play. Late afternoon sees another swim or a cruise in the kayak. And finally, after dinner, comes the most ingratiating part of the day when every one who is in the house, either permanently or temporarily, gathers round oil lamps and the huge grate fire and reads handy books or discusses burning questions of art and life and the theater, or just sits and thinks without discussing.

Peaked Hill Bar is not the sort of place a playwright would choose for workshop if he didn't know what he wished to write about. There is none of the restless stimulus of crowding humanity which a city gives. There is not even the casual and friendly intercourse with other men and women of the small town. It is aloof and alone, spiritually as well as physically, unless, like Eugene O'Neill, you can bring to it the memories of a life full of event and adventure and live with them there as your companions.